

The pictorial art of the stage now more than rivals the actor, and almost supplants the poetry of the dramatist. It has thrust itself into a first place in theatrical affairs, and not even Shakespeare himself is now acceptable to the public unless set forth with a wealth of scenic display. It has its meretricious aspects, undoubtedly; but it is by no means always mere show and glitter. It has often great pomp of color; it is sometimes intensely vulgar; it is frequently an appeal to barbaric taste; and in dramas of a certain character it aims, not only to be dazzling, but sensuous. In these it designs to heat the blood, and fill the imagination with voluptuous images. Female beauty is more or less identified and mingled with it. It exhibits paradises of intoxicating beauty, and places the houries there before our eyes. It is the Mohammedism of art.

But it is not always this. It sometimes affords us pictures of exquisite and elevating beauty. It often reproduces the periods of the past with fidelity and historic splendor. It can be, and occasionally is, all that art in any form can aspire to—the means of refined pleasure and elevating sentiment.

Art upon the stage not only reaches larger numbers than is possible otherwise, but its effects are broader, its illusions more perfect, its impressions more stimulating, and its lessons more decided. It is far more real. It is capable of grander and sublimer effects. It is more satisfying to the imagination. It is more nearly the thing depicted. We speak, of course, of this art in its better and more successful expression. We mean such pictures as were exhibited last year in "Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Olympic; in a recent scene called the "Lilacs" at Niblos; in a few scenes in the French opera; and in several scenes now presented at Wallack's Theatre, in "Much Ado about Nothing," and at Booth's new beautiful dramatic temple, in "Romeo and Juliet." These are all artistically beautiful,

and prove that, while scene-painting has often been low, coarse, false, and hurtful, it is capable of being employed in a higher and purer spirit. In these instances quoted, the stage scenes have nearly the same effect upon the imagination, only more vivid, than a landscape by one of our painters has. Not so completely refining, of course; not so pure in taste; not so simple, symmetrical, and chaste; with more or less thought, no doubt, to dazzle the unthinking—and yet with a largeness, a triumph of perspective, a completeness in proportion and fullness, that render them the most powerful form of pictorial expression.

